

Johnson Brothers Greenhouses



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Hydrangea

Planting & Care Sheet

Hydrangeas require moist, well-drained, acidic soil. When planting hydrangeas in our area, most varieties (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) do best with dappled light or morning sun. Exceptions to this are the Oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and the Panicle Hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*). These two species will grow in full sun as long as the soil is *consistently* moist. Hydrangeas are very hardy; they will tolerate temperatures down to -15* F.

Planting Tips

Prepare the hole for your new plant by incorporating organic matter such as compost, cocoa fiber, and/or cocoa mulch into your native soil. The hole should be twice as large as the new plant's root ball. Loosen the root ball and place in the hole so the top of the plant is slightly above the soil surface. Backfill the hole using a mixture of your native soil & organic matter. Water in well and add more soil mixture as the backfill settles. Create a slight berm (raised edge) around the outside edge of the root ball. This will encourage water into the area around the roots. The soil should be moist but not soggy. Too much water can kill a hydrangea just as will too little water.

Most hydrangeas will grow as wide as they will tall. When planting remember the ultimate height & width so overcrowding will not occur.

Hydrangeas can be prone to powdery mildew. Pruning out weak stems will open up the plant for air to circulate. Watering the base of the plant exclusively, cleaning old leaves & applying mulch under the plant will decrease the incidence of the fungus. Treatment can include use of fungicides according the label directions, both organic and conventional.

Hydrangea Color:

The color of hydrangeas is controlled by the acidity of the soil and the amount of aluminum available to the plant. White hydrangeas do not respond to soil treatment. If you have a white hydrangea it will stay white, though some varieties may develop a blue or pinkish eye. Color correction can take weeks to months. You will need to be patient.

Blue Hydrangeas: Adding aluminum sulfate to the area around the plant will lower the acidity and make the aluminum available to the plant (turning it bluish). It is available in powdered form and should be mixed with water at a rate of ¼ oz. per gallon of water. If too much is added, it can kill the plant. It is better to add too little than too much. Start adding as the plant begins to leaf out in the spring & again at monthly intervals until the plant begins to bloom. In Oct. you can repeat. It can take months to change the color. Adding aluminum sulfate to red hydrangeas can make them almost purple.

Red or Pink Hydrangeas: If the soil pH measures 6.0 to 6.5 then aluminum is not readily available (your hydrangea will naturally be pink or red). Using a high phosphate fertilizer will also tie up aluminum, thereby turning it a brighter shade of pink. If your hydrangea is still bluer than you prefer test your soil pH. Apply lime to the soil to increase the soil pH. This can be applied at a rate of 1 pound for every 10 square feet of surface area once or twice a year.

Pruning

Hydrangeas may bloom on new or old wood. *Hydrangea paniculata*, *Hydrangea arborescens* and *Hydrangea quercifolia* all bloom on new wood or need minimal pruning. As these plants mature, prune to manage size, branch placement, and dead or dying branches. Most mophead and lacecap hydrangeas bloom on old wood (*Hydrangea macrophylla* & *H. serrata*). This means wood that was produced the previous season. Pruning is best done in late winter before the plants break dormancy. At this time remove weak or spindly branches. A third of the oldest canes can be removed to the ground. The other branches can be cut back to control height. Depending on the height of your plant, prune back 6 to 12 inches to a strong bud. Most plants are very forgiving when you prune. If you prune too heavily on hydrangeas, you may delay the bloom time or even have no blooms that year.